

**Jonathyne BRIGGS, *Sounds French: Globalization, Cultural Communities, and Pop Music in France, 1958-1980***

**David Looseley**

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and Anglophone popular music studies, as well as the avatars of French state cultural policy. Looseley draws attention to the ambivalence of the term "populaire" in the French context, where it refers more to "folk" culture; whereas the term "culture de masse", with its elitist overtones, is probably more appropriate to the Anglophone conception of "popular culture". His opening chapter analyses the intervention of the French state in the development of popular culture since as long ago as the mid-nineteenth century, and the tensions that arise between its pretensions to cultural universalism and the growth of commercially-motivated forms of entertainment, notably those of popular music.

His chapter on the discursive history of French popular song is impressively wide-ranging and thoroughly documented, tracing the evolution of notions of authenticity from the Troubadours right up to the early 21st century reactions to recent television talent shows such as "Star Academy". The later chapters are less encyclopaedic although equally well documented, but likely to be of less interest to researchers working on popular music. In general the collection provides a stimulating alternative view of the significance of popular culture in a linguistic domain singularly different from the more familiar Anglo-American mainstream.

Peter HAWKINS

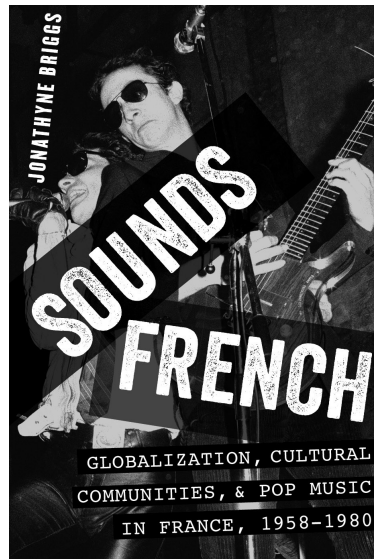
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**Jonathyne Briggs, *Sounds French : Globalization, Cultural Communities, and Pop Music in France, 1958-1980*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015.**

In this book, Jonathyne Briggs provides an excellent and engaging new reading of French popular-musical history that is expertly researched. It makes an important contribution to the small but growing anglophone literature on an area which still has trouble finding a home among traditional university disciplines. Despite the exploratory, interdisciplinary, and sometimes paradigm-shifting scholarship it involves, research in English on French popular music is still largely ignored by both mainstream French studies and popular music studies, neither of which seems to know what to make of it. Paradoxically, it is welcomed much more warmly in France, at least by younger scholars, even though (or perhaps because) popular music is

still a relatively new field of research there, that has itself had to struggle to achieve academic legitimacy. That Briggs is an academic historian working in America is therefore interesting in two ways. First because the French studies community of America is even further behind the UK's in recognising popular music as a scholarly concern as valid as literature, theory and film. And second because, as a consequence, stateless Anglophone scholars in the field are steadily finding themselves more at home in cultural history.

Professor Briggs's overarching concern is with the relationship between popular music, globalisation and community formation in the France of that seminal era from the arrival of



rock and roll around 1958 to the end of the 1970s, after which the acclimatisation, segmentation and official legitimisation of pop music produced somewhat different conditions. The communities he is concerned with in his five chapters are, in order, the “copains” of the yéyé era; exponents of *la chanson française* (Brel, Brassens, Ferré and Gainsbourg) and their fans; post-1968 prog rock (Red Noise, Magma and others); regionalists (particularly Alan Stivell); and punk (from Les Stinky Toys to ultranationalist hardcore).

Chapter 1 deals with the *copains* as a French subculture, but one based on an international youth community imagined as crossing social boundaries, though Briggs aptly points out that the rhetoric of *copinisation* couldn't prevent gender and ethnicity, among other things,

making this universalism a myth. His classificatory terminology here can be a little cloudy in so far as early 1960s pop or “yéyé” are sometimes described indiscriminately as “rock and roll”, when a sharper distinction is surely needed. It's equally misleading to describe Brel, Brassens and co. as “first and foremost pop singers” (Chapter 2, 72). All three in fact began their careers well before the label “pop music” took on the specific discursive characteristics it would have in the 1960s and which made it much more than a mere abbreviation of “popular”.

But this is a minor matter in light of the much greater rigour Briggs in fact brings to his discussion of chanson in Chapter 2. Here, he picks up and runs a good deal further with the persistent scholarly interest in recent years in the conceptualisation of *la chanson française*, a notion that Anglophone scholars in particular struggle with. Briggs helps out by methodically tracing how the conventions of a perceived “genre” were laid down by critics and other mediators; and by demonstrating that such conventions had no “cohesive music center” (76). His point is that, while mediators defined the centrality of the well made lyric as the distinctive feature of French chanson, musically the “genre” (if such it was) was much more ambiguous. And he argues that this ambiguity opened up new possibilities for experimentation and hybridisation in the 1960s and 1970s for the likes of Gainsbourg (Higelin might have been another interesting case study). Perhaps Briggs doesn't question sufficiently whether chanson can realistically be described as a genre. But he does come close to what is for me an irresistible conclusion: that the importance of the lyric isn't a verifiable generic essence so much

as a mythic discourse. And he does suggestively contend that, as globalisation took hold in France, chanson came to be imagined as a remedial reconciliation of French tradition with international modernity and change. Briggs is equally illuminating when he foregrounds the folklorist readings of chanson that prevailed in the 1950s. These represented chanson as tied to France's rural, provincial past, distinguishing it from urban commercial and artistic song. His most useful contribution, then, is in pointing out that at this stage there was still no single conception of chanson until Brel, Brassens and Ferré set its parameters.

Chapter 3 examines progressive rock as an expression of post-1968 revolutionism. The author identifies two types of politicisation at work here. The New Left saw the rock concert as bringing young people together and potentially harnessing the energy this generated for political ends. The more culturally minded "Freak Left" saw rock as a realisation and articulation of May's hopes for a new society in which "cultural distinctions would collapse in a miasma of noise and rhythm" (81) and collective creation replaced bourgeois individualism. In practice, prog rock tried to conflate these two tendencies; and, through case studies including albums by Red Noise and Komintern, Briggs teases out the difficulties of doing so musically. Two less politically oriented bands, Magma and Heldon, aspired to transgress cultural boundaries by merging rock with forms of musical modernism. From here, it was but a step to the depoliticised, more commercial sound of Jean-Michel Jarre.

Chapter 4 covers musical regionalism in Brittany. In the aftermath of May, Breton musicians like Alan Stivell and Tri Yann, Briggs's two main

case studies, tried to modernise the image of their culture by hybridising its traditional folk music with global prog rock idioms, combining preservation with modernisation and cosmopolitanism. He contextualises the emergence of Stivell and others in impressive historical, social and cultural detail, bringing out the importance of the still fresh battles for decolonisation in supplying the new regionalist ideology with an anti-imperialist rhetoric. He also gives a detailed analysis of Stivell's evolution in his albums before 1980, but he wears his musico-logical competence lightly, so that the analysis remains intelligible for those whom Philip Tagg calls "non-musos", as indeed it does throughout the book.

Punk too, Briggs maintains in Chapter 5, was about community, in this case a community of youth once again but this time quite different from the optimistic, consumerist inclusivity of the *copains*. All the subcultures he has so far examined had constructed communities that consumerism had ended up indulging and therefore assimilating. Punk set out deliberately to prevent this *récupération*, so that it could remain the mouthpiece of alienated, marginalised youth. Ultimately, though, it failed, in France as it did in the UK. For Briggs, the stumbling block was authenticity, a fluid notion which French punks took seriously. Some, like the Stinky Toys, attempted to stay true to UK punk's aesthetic by singing in English; others insisted on maintaining the notion of a particularist community by singing in French. Neither approach worked, until punk was reconfigured through hybridisation with chanson and "world music" as *le rock alternatif*, which in Briggs's view helped reconfigure punk as distinctively French. He is right to highlight the issue of authenticity,

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precisely because of its assumed importance to the creation of specific communities. The linguistic and cultural foreignness of UK punk made it doubly hard to define a punk authenticity in France and Briggs carefully unpicks such issues in an illuminating way.

The book ends with a "coda" that spools forward to the success of Daft Punk's *Random Access Memories* in 2014. The author convincingly argues that, although the band's international triumph since the late 1990s suggests that the problem of reconciling global musics with French exceptionalism has been resolved, Daft Punk's global success nonetheless hinges in part on their Frenchness. In this, he leaves us with the thought that notions of national community and belonging have not yet been entirely swept away by globalisation in the French case. The concern to define a Frenchness alongside a universality in the very act of appropriating a

global popular-musical style runs through the history of French popular music to the present day.

Briggs writes knowledgeably, confidently, and always accessibly. There is, it is true, an obtrusive degree of minor error in the text ("l'école est fini", "tête du bois", Procol Harem, "Amorican" instead of "Armorican", "La valise à mille temps"), which ought to have been picked up in the proof-reading. But there are also some agreeably original touches, like the opening of each chapter with the description of a concert, or the provision of a companion website ([www.oup.com/us/soundsfrench](http://www.oup.com/us/soundsfrench)) with useful links enabling the reader to hear and sometimes see the texts being discussed. This is a book that should remain useful for both teaching and research purposes for a long time.

David LOOSELEY

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**Bouziane Daoudi & Hadj Miliani, *Beurs' Melodies. Cent ans de chansons immigrées du blues berbère au rap beur*, Éditions Séguier, 2003.**

Dans leur ouvrage paru en 2003, Bouziane Daoudi et Hadj Miliani proposent de se pencher, par le biais d'une perspective historique, sur un univers musical bien spécifique, en tant qu'il est activé par des processus d'immigration, comme nous l'indique son sous-titre : « Cent ans de chansons immigrées du blues berbère au rap beur. » C'est à l'aune d'une histoire « convulsive » que l'on est invité à découvrir des trajectoires musicales d'immigrés maghrébins, pris en permanence dans une tension entre leurs appartenances culturelles, leurs attachements à

la « communauté » d'origine et la culture « d'accueil ». Cette tension fait apparaître à partir des années 1980 l'émergence et le maintien de ce que les auteurs appellent une « culture beur », associée à la fois à la « question immigrée » ou au « fameux problème d'intégration » au sein du paysage social et politique français et à la fois aux difficultés posées par des formes de stigmatisation et de discrimination persistantes.

Après avoir procédé à un historique des principaux faits relatifs aux mouvements migratoires